Testimony for the Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee

SB 817 AN ACT CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION

Submitted by Patricia O’Neill, Ph.D., CSU-AAUP President, Associate Professor of Psychology, Western Connecticut State University

Dear Representative Haddad, Senator Haskell, and Members of the Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly

My name is Patricia O’Neill, Associate Professor of Psychology at WCSU, and President of the Connecticut State University-American Association of University Professors.

I urge your support for SB 817, An Act Concerning Higher Education, which proposes a study of higher education in the state. I would also recommend that such a study examines, carefully, the CSCU System.

This System, which is the result of the merger of the 4 Connecticut State Universities, 12 community and technical colleges, and Charter Oak, has been in place for 8 years. The merger was presumably going to result in savings, and benefits for our students. We now should have enough evidence to learn whether this merger has resulted in improved outcomes for our students. This is a vital question that needs an answer.

We should be able to learn whether this merger has resulted in improvements to the individual institutions. Six of the twelve community college Presidents have either left or retired, suggesting a degree of turmoil that is harmful to individual institutions.

The proposed consolidation, in Students First, of certain “back-office” functions such as Institutional Research into one centralized behemoth may have some unintended side effects. Such a centralization of functions best carried out by local constituents may risk an institution’s accreditation status, which would be devastating for that institution, and, for the entire system.

It is time to carefully consider this system, and whether it achieves what it was supposed to achieve. It is troubling that Connecticut is moving in the direction of greater and greater centralization, in the CSCU System, when other systems of higher education around the country are moving away from such extreme centralization, recognizing that certain decisions and actions are best taken by individuals at a local level.

Thank you for your time.